



AP/Wideworld

Europe and Muslims on Collision Course

Europe is largely unrepentant for publishing cartoons that offended Muslims, who responded by burning embassies and threatening lives. There is a dangerous divide here.

- Trumpet Staff
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Violence continues to plague the Middle East and other Muslim countries because European newspapers published satirical cartoons that offended Muslims.

As Muslims decry European insensitivity toward their faith, newspapers argue that the case is a matter of freedom of speech—that no culture should trump the cardinal virtues of democracy. So, it is a simple test of wills. Europe will not let Muslims dictate what it means to be European, and Muslims will not let Europeans dictate what is sacred to Muslims.

What seems like a trivial matter actually has broad implications and serious consequences. Provocative politics on both sides of the Mediterranean basin are leading to a clash of civilizations between Europe and Muslims.

How did these cartoons escalate into a crisis?

It all started when Danish writer Kare Bluitgen, an author of children's books on religious themes, wanted to produce a book about the life of Muhammad. However, since most Muslims believe that any illustrations of Muhammad are strictly forbidden, Bluitgen could not find anyone to take on the job of providing pictures for the book. In fact, it is reported that some artists refused the job for fear of suffering the same fate as Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh. For producing a film that offended Muslims, Van Gogh was shot with a barrage of bullets, had his throat slit, was stabbed in the chest and left for dead with two knives planted in his torso on Nov. 2, 2004.

Bluitgen's difficulty in finding someone to illustrate his book was picked up by the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*, which then initiated a debate among several Danish newspapers on the issue of how much Danes should censor themselves in the name of cultural pluralism. They wondered if freedom of speech should take a back seat to Muslim sensitivities.

In September last year, the paper decided the answer was no. It commissioned 12 cartoonists to produce satirical drawings of Muhammad. One depicted Muhammad with a bomb as a turban; another showed Muhammad telling suicide bombers arriving in heaven: "Stop, stop, we've run out of virgins." *Jyllands-Posten* published the cartoons.

The reaction was immediate. Local protests came fast and furious. Amid the storm, the paper remained aloof. *Jyllands-Posten's* foreign editor was quoted in the February 4 *Guardian*: "Nobody saw this coming," he said. "We didn't think the cartoons had crossed any line."

Then on October 19, ambassadors from Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Iran and several other Islamic countries sought a meeting with the Danish prime minister to demand that the paper be prosecuted. They were rebuffed, however, with Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen remaining intransigent, arguing that the matter was local, and that his government could not interfere with matters of free speech. The case actually appeared to be settling down.

However, a group of Danish imams refused to let the issue go. They took a dossier of the cartoons and circulated them in Saudi Arabia and Egypt. The *Guardian* wrote, “[I]n Muslim cyber-chatrooms, on blogs, and across the Internet, outrage was building fast. From Denmark, the pictures were being pinged by sms from Kuwait to Palestine” (ibid.).

When Saudi Arabia recalled its ambassador and Libya shut its embassy, the problem mushroomed back into a crisis.

It was at this point that the Danish prime minister decided to apologize, expressing regret at the offense caused to Muslims. *Jyllands-Posten* also apologized, saying it had “indisputably offended many Muslims.” But despite the apologies, other European newspapers that had been observing the row decided to protest what they perceived as *Jyllands-Posten*’s cowardly stance toward Muslim demands. Newspapers across Europe began to support the argument for free speech by publishing the cartoons—first in France, then papers in Germany, Italy, Spain, Norway, the Netherlands and six other countries followed suit.

Muslim reaction was white hot. Muslims started riots, burned embassies and threatened lives. A cascade of riots and demonstrations cut a swath of anger across East Asia into the Middle East and as far North Africa.

The supposed insensitivity of the *Jyllands-Posten* produced the crisis, but *the Danish imams*, rather than letting the problem die down at the local level, provoked a reaction.

This episode is the latest in a series of events that has Muslims and Europeans on a collision course: the Van Gogh assassination; the Madrid bombing; the London bombing; the France riots. European defiance in the face of Muslim anger over the cartoons shows the hardening of Europeans’ attitudes toward what they view more and more as an alien and hostile culture.

How can this situation not lead, eventually, to war?

If *cartoons* can inflame the hatreds of Muslims to the point that they are baying for blood, it is only a matter of time before Europeans decide that they have simply had enough of this nonsense, and that it is time to strike back.

Those voices calling for greater sensitivity to Muslim sensibility, as if that would prevent the problem from ever breaking out again, simply do not understand the nature of what they are up against: a religion that seeks—one way or another, depending on which of its adherents you ask—to *convert all non-Muslims*. A European culture that would be sufficiently “sensitive” to Islamic law would quite frankly be one *in subjection* to Islamic law—and anything short of that is going to produce clashes of the sort we are witnessing today.

But Europeans simply will not abide such circumstances. They are increasingly uncomfortable with the fact that their homelands house 20 million more Muslims today than 30 years ago, and that Islam has grown to become Europe’s second-largest religion. They are getting restless and starting to take action, establishing stronger anti-terrorism forces, increasing their police’s freedom of action against Islamist elements, expelling radical Muslims from their midst—and now, defiantly exercising what they view as a fundamental right to publicly criticize and parody the holiest symbols of that religion.

The outrage on both sides of this issue may calm down in the short term, but it is only a matter of time before another incident brings the simmering hatreds right back to a boil. One of these times, the lid will be blown off completely. The most radical elements within the Islamist world are looking for a war—and they are going to get it.

Observers must watch for growing evidence of this development, because the narrative of end-time events provided us by biblical prophecy explicitly describes a dramatic clash between the most violent of Islamic forces and the European beast they are already beginning to provoke. ■

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